

Closer by lollercakes

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Summary:

The summer BBQ trope of finding their way back to each other. Lightly linked to Girl from the North Country.

Closer

Author's Note:

- For [StarMaamMke](#).

It's sweltering. He thinks he sees the paint melting off the road sign as he drives across town with El in tow, the windows down and the air conditioning barely keeping the sweat from his eyes.

"Are we almost there?" El asks from beside him, her curly hair extra frizzy in the humidity. He can't help but notice that her cheeks are red, her perpetual paleness nowhere to be found on this hot summer day.

"Almost. Although it's not going to get much better once we're outside of the truck, you know that right?" He chuckles as she rolls her eyes, a palm swiping over her face.

"Yeah - but Mike said they would have a slipper or something we could play on. It's water and soap? Like the dishes?"

"You mean a slip and slide?" His mind conjures up the commercial from the TV, flashes of broken limbs making him swallow back his retort as she nods.

"I think so. He says it's fun," she says with a shrug. He turns the final corner to the Wheeler's and watches out of the corner of his eye as she sits up and practically vibrates in her seat.

“You nervous?” He asks as he pulls up to the curb, another car filling the block of vehicles parked along the road. El looks up at him with a wide smile, eyes bright as she shakes her head. “Good - if ever you want to leave, just let me know. We can go anytime, okay?”

“I know - you’ve told me a hundred times,” she replies and climbs out of the truck. Together they head towards the house, the music and smoke from the BBQ welcoming them through the fenced gate.

They’re barely inside before The Party is swarming El and dragging her further into the yard, disappearing from view and leaving him holding his six pack of beer alone at the entrance.

“Hey stranger,” a voice calls from the corner, Karen Wheeler’s hand shooting into the air as she sits in the shade. Squinting through his sunglasses, he tries to make out the other faces at the table before stepping over to join them, a smile breaking through when he notices Joyce in the corner. “I’m so glad you guys could make it!” Karen exclaims and pulls him in for a one-armed hug.

“Anything for the kid,” he mumbles and catches Joyce’s eye over Karen’s shoulder. Joyce smiles back at him and takes a sip of her beer, arms crossed on the table. Pulling back he looks around at the decor and Ted Wheeler leaning over the grill, nodding his head towards the man. “Guess I should go hangout with the cooks, right?”

“God no - sit down Chief, join us!” Karen crows before pulling out a chair and pushing him into it. Beside him Joyce snorts around her bottle, glancing up at him from between her lashes as her friend cracks off a beer and sets it down in front of him. “I’m going to put these in a cooler - you two need to catch up!”

Hopper groans and takes a gulp of the cold liquid courage, leaning back in his seat to look at the woman at his side. "What?" He says with a laugh, lifting his can to her for a cheers.

"Nothing - just you're looking mighty uncomfortable today Hop," she replies and sits back in her own chair, an arm still crossed over her chest. He takes in the sight of her in her summer dress, a lightness about her that wasn't there a month ago.

"Well, I mean, Karen - " he stutters, desperate to find anything to respond with.

"Don't worry about it, I'm just kidding. Maybe I'm a bit tipsy." For a moment he thinks that's it, that's why she's glowing, but a small part of him sees through that and notices the way her smile reaches her eyes in a way it hasn't in a long time.

"You look good, Joyce," he says lowly, just loud enough for her to hear. The blush that comes to her cheeks has nothing to do with the heat and the realization makes him lean back in his chair, his heart racing in his chest.

"Thanks. Why don't you get me another drink? I don't think Karen's coming back to give me a refill." She nods to where Karen is now fully engulfed in a conversation with the other women of the neighbourhood, her attention drawn elsewhere. Hopper takes the instruction and retrieves another beer, sliding his chair closer so that his arm bumps Joyce's when he sits down.

"You're welcome," he grumbles before popping the cap with his keys. They spend the next hour drinking and cracking jokes, the familiarity and ease of the moment not lost on either of them. Though others stop by the table and greet them, neither of them pay much attention to the newcomers before deviating back to their antics of heckling and cajoling.

Eventually, it's Hopper's hand that moves from where it's wrapped around his drink to rest next to hers on the table. The slip is subtle, barely noticeable, but when Joyce's fingers brush against his it makes a lump form in his throat. He plays with it for a moment, his pinky finger sliding over her knuckle, before he catches her eye and slides her hand into his.

They don't say a thing before letting their joined palms hang between them under the table, an invisible link that settles their jokes into quiet shared words. The conversation turns to a walk down memory lane and Joyce leans into it, her head resting on Hopper's shoulder as the afternoon sun starts to lower in the sky.

"You two look pretty comfy over here," Karen hisses as she places a tray of watermelon on the table. Joyce sits up slowly, awkwardly pulling away from the contact and carefully straightening her dress.

"Sorry - did you need a hand?" Joyce offers, getting to her feet and stepping behind Hopper's chair. Her hand finds its way to his shoulder, the heat of it unmissable as Karen looks between the two of them.

"Me? Nah - Ted's setting up the fireworks and I'm just getting dessert out. You guys sit down, you've already got the best seats in the house," Karen adds with a wink before disappearing back into the

house.

Hopper seizes the moment and grabs Joyce's hand from his shoulder, bringing it to his lips for the briefest of kisses. When his eyes slide up to meet hers he can see the hesitation in her gaze, the uncertainty of her movements as she looks back down at him.

"Is it too soon?" She whispers just for him, her brow furrowed as she holds onto his hand tightly.

He knows why she's hesitating. Bob died less than a year ago and here he was, making a move on her at a party for their kids. It was shameful. Pathetic.

"Joyce," he starts, getting to his feet so that he's towering over her with the sun setting behind them. It was unstoppable. Probably fate.

"I'm allowed to be happy," she says more to herself than to him, a stray palm coming to rest on his chest. He lets her work up to it, lets her look up at him in her own time and when she does it's like a punch to his chest. "I'm allowed this," Joyce admits before lifting up on her toes, just high enough for him to lean over and press his lips to hers.

The kiss is brief, chaste, and it nearly bowls him over. He wants to drag her closer and hold her to him but behind them he can hear Will's shouts of excitement and El's questions, a reminder of where they are and the very public moment of affection they were sharing in the Wheeler's backyard.

“Can we go somewhere?” Joyce asks when he pulls away, his hands gripping her elbows and keeping her close. He lets his breathing settle before looking around them, thankful that the eyes are drawn to the activities in the grass and not the two figures lurking near the house. A quick nod and he’s pulling her through the gate, abandoning their drinks and leading her into the front yard with a wide smile across his face.

Alone in street, they pull each other down the empty roadway as the sun starts to set and the shadows grow long. They barely reach his truck before he’s pressing her up against it, his hands gripping her hips and his mouth meeting hers. She sighs into him, moans at his insistence and mewls as she grants him entry.

“We can’t - not in the street!” She laughs as he nips down her neck, a hand slipping under the strap of her dress.

“Not in the street? I don’t remember you ever being opposed to it before,” he chuckles and shifts back up to meet her eyes. The light from earlier is shining through, her youthful smile as bright as it was when they were foolish and carefree.

“Hop,” she chastises, gripping his collar and pulling him back down to her. She kisses him once. Twice. Then leans back and drops a hand to her side, a smirk on her lips as the back door of his truck pops open. “Come on,” she hisses, shifting her hips until he lifts her onto the bench. He holds her there for a moment, stepping between her legs.

“You sure?” He rasps as his hands slide under her dress and up her

thighs. "We don't have to, we can just stay here, make out a little then go back and catch the fireworks."

Her eyes close and he thinks for a hot flash of a second that she's going to change her mind, his body tightening ahead of the rejection. But then she looks down at him, a hand coming to his chin as her thumb brushes across his skin. "I'm sure. But I feel compelled to tell you now that I miss the beard," she says with a sigh, tilting her head as she watches him.

His smile widens before he turns and nips her finger, drawing it between his lips playfully. "I know - but it was just too hot. Besides, don't I remind you of Magnum?"

Scoffing, she wraps her arms around his neck and shakes her head, a laugh falling from her. "God - that is not something to strive for." Joyce laughs and then lets go, leaning back and releasing his neck so that she can stretch her arms out along the bench. "But I mean, I seem to remember that you were Magnum before the mustache... Am I wrong?"

Hopper groans and looks around him, lifting her legs and pushing them back so that he can climb in after her and shut the door with a snap. "You're killing me," he grunts, propping himself off of her as much as he can. The humidity of the day hovers around them, thick and heavy as they share the small space.

"It's so fucking hot- " She starts and he cuts her off, stealing her breath as he swoops in for a kiss that curls her toes. They struggle to find a comfortable spot as their mouths explore, eventually shifting until she's astride him and their clothes are pushed aside and exposing as much skin as they can.

“I went for a check-up two weeks ago... Doc says I’m clean,” he mumbles as Joyce grinds against him, the move making him grow harder with every passing second. He half expects her to not hear him as she bites her lip and runs her hands into her mess of hair.

“Good - not that I’ve doubted you but I’ve got the rest taken care of,” she sighs, dropping her hands to his chest and looking down at him with hooded eyes. The moment stretches out between them, gazes locked as his hands slowly work up her arms and into her hair. He holds her above him, thumb brushing along her cheekbone as he stares up at her with a newfound wonder.

“Are we doing this? Like, really doing this?” He asks slowly, careful not to blow out that spark but needing to know. God, he needed to know where they stood. There’s a slow nod, a slip of her smile before she buries her face in his neck. “Hey - Joy, no, talk to me,” he soothes, panic bubbling in his chest.

His heart races as she breathes heavily against him, her body vibrating with each inhale. The fear of alienating her, of breaking the careful friendship that they’ve developed over the last year outweighs everything, especially the thought of going back to the party with blue-balls. He’d walk into a million parties eternally uncomfortable as long as she continued to shine next to him.

“You’re starting to freak me out here,” he admits with a tense laugh, a hand curling in her hair and holding her to him. If she was going to burrow in, he was open and ready. She was already inside his heart - had been for years - and he would cling to it for as long as he could.

“Don’t - Hopper,” she laughs and hiccups, drawing back and slapping his chest with her hands. Her eyes aren’t red-rimmed like he expected, but wide and filled with mirth as she looks down at him with a soft smile. “I needed a minute to be sure this was real.”

“It’s definitely real. I know last time we weren’t - it wasn’t right. But now... Joyce,” he sighs and pulls her down for a kiss, watching every second as she hovers above him. The moment seems to crack and shatter and her lips find his, breathless as she presses in.

A flurry of bumps and loose limbs fill the space as they work together to shift and align, his belt undone and her hands on his hips. “I don’t want to stop, okay? This is me telling you that this is real - that this is - “

She doesn’t get to finish her sentence before he’s reaching up for her and shaking his head, a shushing noise mixed between his laughter. Joyce takes the hint and reaches a hand into his pants that traces along the edge of him, a smile on her lips as she meets her mouth with his. He groans at the contact and closes his eyes, his hips rising as her palm wraps around his length.

“Jesus,” he hisses, desperate for the feel of her. When she eventually pulls him free his hips jerk up to her abruptly, his body betraying the cool demeanor he’s trying to convey.

“Don’t worry, I feel the same way,” she breathes knowingly into his ear before pulling the lobe with her teeth. The old playful Joyce appears as his hands slide under her dress and cup her breasts, a thumb and forefinger tweaking her nipples and eliciting small mewls from her chest.

There's no hesitation in her movements as she lifts up and slides her panties aside, hovering over him as his ministrations pause and their breathing stops. Slowly, she sinks down and lets him stretch her, holding him inside her as long as she can before she has to move.

It turns and shifts after that and soon she's riding him with tiny cries, a hand guiding her hips and another on her breast. Thrust after thrust he pushes up into her, trying and fighting to get closer as the heat twists through the truck and brings sweat to their skin. Every kiss and every breath is mixed with a hint of salt, telling as he wrestles to bring her ever closer.

"You feel - " she moans, moving quicker as silent words spill from her. Hopper takes the hint and drops his hand to her center, his fingers finding her nub and working it furiously. "Oh god," she keens and scratches her nails into his chest.

Somehow he manages to pull himself up until his lips can drag her nipple into his mouth, the motions with his hands and tongue combine and make her hips buck until she's coming apart around him. Her body tenses as her mouth forms a silent 'O', the sound of fireworks from the yard perfectly timed as his own body fights and fails to stave off his own release. He comes with a grunt, filling her as his hands grasp at her exposed skin and light fills the sky outside the truck.

With cooling skin and evened breathing, Hopper feels himself slip from her warmth as he resettles her dress straps on her shoulders. "Should we get back to the party to watch the fireworks?" He asks as she smiles lazily down at him, her torso leaning against the seatback.

“One more minute?” She sighs and spreads out across his chest, her hair curling in his face.

“We’ve got all the time in the world,” he replies softly. And he means it.